



American Cultural History: Selected Topics Material Culture and Consumer Culture

COURSE GUIDE

History 546

Spring 2007

Prof. L. Tolbert
Office: HHRA 2109
Email: ltolber@uncg.edu, this is the best way to reach me

Office Phone: 334-3987
Hours: Mon. and Wed. 1:00-1:50
and by appointment

Scope of the Course

This course is designed as an advanced reading seminar focusing on the critical perspectives and methods of historians who study American cultural history. The course is designed with two basic goals in mind: 1. To introduce you to the interdisciplinary practice of cultural history, and 2. To explore key periods in the development of American culture from the colonial era to the early twentieth century. The central theme of the course this semester is "material culture and consumer culture." We will explore the evolution of consumer culture in the United States from the so-called "consumer revolution" of the eighteenth century through the development of a mass consumer society in the twentieth century. We will pay particular attention to the contributions of material culture scholars for our understanding of the social and political dynamics that have shaped consumer culture in American history.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester students should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skill development in the following areas.

- Explain distinctive periods in the development of American consumer culture from the eighteenth through the twentieth century.
- Explain the political dynamics of American consumer culture in the context of a capitalist democracy over time.
- Explain how objects have functioned in the cultural construction of race, class, and gender.
- Understand and evaluate a variety of methods for using visual (objects, photographs, art, etc.) as well as text-based sources as historical evidence.
- Synthesize central arguments of each reading assignment and evaluate major points of agreement or disagreement among particular authors as the course unfolds.

Required Readings

Books: (available at UNCG Bookstore and on reserve in Jackson Library)

Bushman, Richard. *Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. NY: Vintage, 1992.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

Domosh, Mona. *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988.

Hunter, Tera. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Lovell, Margaretta. *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans and Patrons in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Spigel, Lynn. *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

Journal Articles and Book Chapters: (available on ereserves, JSTOR, or other journal databases. Use Journal Finder to locate articles not posted on ereserves.)

Breen, T. H. "‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, No. 119 (May 1988): 73-104.

Breen, T.H. "Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (July 1993): 471-501.

- Carrier, James. "Reconciling Personal Commodities and Personal Relations in Industrial Society," *Theory and Society* Vol. 19, No. 5 (October 1990): 579-598.
- Clarke, Alison J. "Tupperware: Product as Social Relation." In Martin, Ann Smart and J. Ritchie Garrison. *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. Distributed by University of Tennessee Press, 1997. [ereserves]
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth. "For Colored" and "For White": Segregating Consumption in the South," pp. 162-182. In *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*. Edited by Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon. Princeton University Press, 2000. [ereserves]
- Leach, William R. "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925" *Journal of American History* Vol. 71, No. 2 (1984): 319-342.
- Martin, Ann Smart. "Commercial Space as Consumption Arena: Retail Stores in Early Virginia," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture: Vol. 8 People, Power, and Places* (2000): 201-218.
- Martin, Ann Smart. "Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework." *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 28. No. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 141-157.
- Perkins, Elizabeth A. "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510.
- Prown, Jules David. "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" In *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*. Edited by Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000. [pp. 11-28]
- Roediger, David R. "White Skins, Black Masks: Minstrelsy and White Working Class Formation before the Civil War." In *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991. [ereserves]
- Tolbert, Lisa. "'The Purchase-Inducing Force of the Store': Southern Paternalism and Self-Service Store Design in the Early Twentieth Century." Paper presented at the Southern Historical Association Annual Meeting, November 2006. [posted to Blackboard]
- Tolbert, Lisa. "The Aristocracy of the Market Basket: Self-Service Food Shopping in the New South." Paper presented at the Hagley Food Chains Conference, November 2006. [posted to Blackboard]
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 55, No. 1. (Jan., 1998), pp. 3-38.
- White, Shane, "The Death of James Johnson." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (December 1999): 753-795.
- AHR Forum. *American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec. 1992): 1369-1430. The forum consists of the following:
 Lawrence W. Levine, "[The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences](#)," pp. 1369-1399

Robin D. G. Kelley, "[Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk,'](#)" pp. 1400-1408
 Natalie Zemon Davis, "[Toward Mixtures and Margins,](#)" pp. 1409-1416
 T. J. Jackson Lears, "[Making Fun of Popular Culture,](#)" pp. 1417-1426
 Lawrence W. Levine, "[Levine Responds,](#)" pp. 1427-1430

Evaluation

Undergraduate Students

Participation	10%
Midterm	30%
Book Review	30%
Primary Source Analysis	30%

Graduate Students

Participation	10%
Midterm	30%
Review Essay	30%
Primary Source Analysis	30%

Attendance Policy

Faithful attendance is essential for your learning in this course. Therefore, beyond the part attendance plays in the overall participation grade, **there will be a 3% reduction of the student's final grade for each absence after the first 2.** Beyond even this penalty, a student who seriously neglects attendance and preparation risks failing the course.

Participation (10%)

This assessment will be based on three criteria:

1. Consistent attendance--This is a seminar, not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course.
2. Thorough preparation for class--readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time. Late assignments will be penalized by a 3% reduction in the final grade for every day the assignment is late. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit. It is very important that you make arrangements with me **in advance of the due date** if you will not be able to meet an assignment deadline in the course.
3. Regular contributions to class discussions—the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Discussions will take place during every class meeting in both small group exercises and as a whole class and you will have opportunities throughout the semester to develop your oral communication skills.

Midterm (30%, due 2 March)

Undergraduate Students: A set of essay questions will be distributed well in advance of the due date. Tests should be typed, about 7-10 pages double-spaced, with appropriate citations in Turabian style [<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.html>]. You will submit your written assignments electronically to my email address. Late assignments will be penalized by a

3% reduction in the final grade for every day the assignment is late. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit. It is very important that you make arrangements with me **in advance of the due date** if you will not be able to meet an assignment deadline in the course.

Graduate Students: A set of essay questions will be distributed well in advance of the due date. Tests should be typed, about 10-12 pages double-spaced, with appropriate citations in Turabian style [<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/handouts/turabian.html>]. You will submit your written assignments electronically to my email address. Late assignments will be penalized by a 3% reduction in the final grade for every day the assignment is late. Assignments later than one week will not be accepted for credit. It is very important that you make arrangements with me **in advance of the due date** if you will not be able to meet an assignment deadline in the course.

Book Review/Review Essay (30%)

We will use as our class standard the book review guidelines for the American Studies journal, *American Quarterly* (http://www.americanquarterly.org/index.php/about/book_reviews). These guidelines have also been posted to Blackboard. Reviews are due by 5:00 pm on the Friday in the same week as the class discussion of the book is scheduled.

Review due dates:

Lovell, 2 Feb.

Domosh, 2 March

Spigel, 20 April

Bushman, 16 February

Hunter, 16 March

Grier, 23 February

Cohen, 13 April

Undergraduate Students: Follow the *American Quarterly* standard for a review of a single book (2500-3000 words). You will sign up to review one of the assigned books. Your review should take into account the professional evaluations of at least two different scholars (if possible) in published reviews of the book. You will summarize your evaluation of the book for class discussion on the date the book is assigned.

Graduate Students: Follow the *American Quarterly* standard for a review of multiple books (no more than 5000 words). You will sign up to review one of the assigned books. In addition to the assigned reading, your review should evaluate two additional books on a related theme or subject. Your review should take into account the professional evaluations of at least two different scholars (if possible) in published reviews of the books. You will summarize your evaluation of the book for class discussion on the date the book is assigned.

Primary Source Analysis: Twentieth-Century Consumer Magazines (30%, due 25 April)

Undergraduate Students: Select **one** issue of one of the popular consumer magazines listed below and evaluate the content of the issue using arguments of at least **three** different assigned readings to put the source in appropriate historical context. Be sure to evaluate visual content as well as text. You may focus on any decade of the twentieth century before 1970. 7-10 pages typed, double-spaced, with appropriate Turabian style footnotes and bibliography.

Graduate Students: Compare and contrast **two** different issues of the popular consumer magazines listed below. You may compare any two issues, but be sure to state your research goal. For example, you may select two different magazines from the same year to compare advertising strategies and target audience; or compare the issues from the same magazine over time (1920 vs. 1955, for example) to evaluate changes in mid-twentieth-century consumer culture. Use at least **five** different assigned readings to put the source in appropriate historical context. Also, explicitly consider theoretical and methodological frameworks explored in assigned readings that are useful for evaluating the content of the source as historical evidence. 10-15 pages, typed, double-spaced, with appropriate Turabian-style footnotes and bibliography.

Here is a list of approved popular consumer magazines of the twentieth century. If you would like to use a magazine that is not on this list, you should get my approval well in advance of the due date for this assignment.

Ladies' Home Journal (AP2 .L135 [v.1-9 on Film 3570], holdings start in 1890)
Better Homes and Gardens (NA7100 .B45 [v.2-4 on Film 1562] holdings start in 1924)
Good Housekeeping (TX1 .G7, holdings start in 1916)
Saturday Evening Post (Microfilm--Main 2nd Floor-- Film 853, holdings start in 1919)
Life magazine (AP2 .L547, 1936-1972)
Ebony (Microfilm--Main 2nd Floor-- Film 2266, holdings start in 1957)
Opportunity (E185.5 .O6 1, 1923-1949)
Crisis (E185.5.C92, holdings start in 1922)
House and Garden (NA7100 .H6 1 holdings start in 1901)
House Beautiful (NA7100 .H65, holdings start in 1897)
Vogue (Microfilm--Main 2nd Floor-- Film 2384, holdings start in 1937)
Harper's Bazaar (TT500 .H3, holdings start in 1934)



Course Schedule

January 10 Introductions

January 17 Consumer Revolution

Read:

Bushman, Gentility, 1700-1790

Breen, T. H. "‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, No. 119 (May 1988): 73-104.

January 24 Theoretical Frameworks: Consumerism and Material Culture

Read:

Martin, Ann Smart. "Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework." *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 28. No. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1993): 141-157.

Prown, Jules David. "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction?" In *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*. Edited by Jules David Prown and Kenneth Haltman. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000. [pp. 11-28]

January 31 Artisans and Consumers: the Politics of Consumption in the Revolutionary Era

Read:

Lovell, Margaretta. *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans and Patrons in Early America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Breen, T.H. "Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (July 1993): 471-501.

February 2 Lovell Review due. Email to lctolber@uncg.edu by 5:00 p.m.

February 7 Households and Stores: Spaces of Consumption

Read:

Martin, Ann Smart. "Commercial Space as Consumption Arena: Retail Stores in Early Virginia," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture: Vol. 8 People, Power, and Places* (2000): 201-218.

Perkins, Elizabeth A. "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. "Wheels, Looms, and the Gender Division of Labor in Eighteenth-Century New England" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 55, No. 1. (Jan., 1998), pp. 3-38.

February 14 Antebellum contexts: Consumption and the Cultural Construction of Race

Read:

Bushman, Respectability, 1790-1850

David R. Roediger. "White Skins, Black Masks: Minstrelsy and White Working Class Formation before the Civil War." In *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London: Verso, 1991.

White, Shane, "The Death of James Johnson." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (December 1999): 753-795.

February 16 Bushman review due. Email to lctolber@uncg.edu by 5:00 pm.

February 21 Parlor and Department Store: Spaces and Symbols of Consumption in Victorian America

Read:

Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988.

Leach, William R. "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1890-1925" *Journal of American History* Vol. 71, No. 2 (1984): 319-342.

February 23 Grier review due. Email to lctolber@uncg.edu by 5:00 pm.

February 28 Consumerism as Imperialism

Read:

Domosh, Mona. *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

March 2 Midterm due. Domosh review due. Email to lctolber@uncg.edu by 5:00 pm.

March 7 Spring Break

March 14 Regional Contexts: Workers, Consumers, and Race in the New South

Read:

Hunter, Tera. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

March 16 Hunter review due. Email to lctolber@uncg.edu by 5:00 pm.

March 21 Segregated Consumption

Read:

Grace Elizabeth Hale, "For Colored" and "For White": Segregating Consumption in the South, pp. 162-182. In *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*. Edited by Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon. Princeton University Press, 2000. [ereserves]

Carrier, James. "Reconciling Personal Commodities and Personal Relations in Industrial Society," *Theory and Society* Vol. 19, No. 5 (October 1990): 579-598.

Tolbert, Lisa. "'The Purchase-Inducing Force of the Store': Southern Paternalism and Self-Service Store Design in the Early Twentieth Century." Paper presented at the Southern Historical Association Annual Meeting, November 2006. [posted to Blackboard]

Tolbert, Lisa. "The Aristocracy of the Market Basket: Self-Service Food Shopping in the New South." Paper presented at the Hagley Food Chains Conference, November 2006. [posted to Blackboard]

March 28 no class

April 4 Problems of Studying Consumers in Mass Industrial Contexts

Read:

AHR Forum. *American Historical Review* Vol. 97, No. 5 (Dec. 1992): 1369-1430. The forum consists of the following:

Lawrence W. Levine, "[The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences](#)," pp. 1369-1399

Robin D. G. Kelley, "[Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk,'](#)" pp. 1400-1408

Natalie Zemon Davis, "[Toward Mixtures and Margins](#)," pp. 1409-1416

T. J. Jackson Lears, "[Making Fun of Popular Culture](#)," pp. 1417-1426

Lawrence W. Levine, "[Levine Responds](#)," pp. 1427-1430

April 11 Constructing a Mass Consumer Society in the Post-WWII era

Read:

Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

Clarke, Alison J. "Tupperware: Product as Social Relation." In Martin, Ann Smart and J. Ritchie Garrison. *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*. Winterthur, DE: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum. Distributed by University of Tennessee Press, 1997. [ereserves]

April 13 Cohen review due. Email to lctolber@uncg.edu by 5:00 pm.

April 18 Material Culture, Media, and Mass Consumption in the Postwar Suburbs

Read:

Spigel, Lynn. *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.

April 20 Spigel review due. Email to lctolber@uncg.edu by 5:00 pm.

April 25 Primary Source Analysis due. Research reports and course evaluations.